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THE FINAL OUTCOME OF SIN.

A HOMILETICAL MONOGRAPH.

BY THE

REV. A. SUTHERLAND, D.D.



Toronto:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR AT THE METHODIST BOOK AND PUBLISHING HOUSE,
78 & 80 KING STREET EAST.

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PREFATORY.

THIS is a plain paper, designed for plain people. It is by no means an exhaustive discussion of the subject—that would require a large volume; but it contains a brief statement of some of the main arguments bearing upon the Scripture doctrine of the future condition of the wicked. Technical terms and affectation of learning have been avoided, and the arguments have been presented in such a form as may be easily understood by any person of average intelligence, even supposing his opportunities for theological reading have been of the most limited kind. It is hoped that if no other good results from the publication of this tract, it may at best stimulate someone to a wider course of reading and investigation on the all-important subject of which it treats. The author makes no special claim to originality of treatment. He has simply utilized material that has accumulated in the course of his reading, moulding it into such form as might best suit the object he had in view. If the arguments fail to convince, they may at least induce some gifted pen to write something better.

A. S.

TORONTO, February, 1886.

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The Final Outcome of Sin.

THE gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. It reveals God's method of saving men ; and there is no other method, that we know anything about, whereby they can be saved. What, then, is to become of those who obey not the gospel,—who live and die rejecting it ?

To this question various answers have been given. Some say—"They will have another chance—another probation ;" others say—"They will be punished for a lengthened period and then annihilated ;" others say—"They will be punished for an indefinite time (how long we do not know), and then be restored to Divine favour and admitted to heaven ;" while others again hold that the wicked will be punished forever : that neither by restoration nor annihilation will their punishment cease.

This awful question cannot be settled by reason alone, for we have not sufficient data on which to base conclusions ; neither can it be decided by experience, for as yet the rewards and punishments of the future are but truths in man's intellect, not facts in his history. Still less can we decide it by our instincts or desires. We are not at liberty to reject a truth because we do not like it. All we know, or can know in this life, about this doctrine must come from revelation ; for only one who has been behind the veil, and knows the end from the beginning, can speak with authority. If, then, we would avoid mistakes which all eternity cannot rectify, we must listen reverently to what God hath spoken.

Within the past few years the doctrine of future—especially eternal—punishment has been widely discussed. A good deal of vehement rhetoric has been expended in denouncing the doctrine as derogatory to the Divine character,—thus presenting the awful spectacle of sinful, short-sighted men sitting in judgment on

their Maker, and presuming to settle what is and what is not becoming in the administration of His government. So, in former times, men vehemently denied that the earth revolved around the sun; but in spite of all their clamour the earth still swept onward in its orbit with majestic pace, and so, in spite of reckless denunciations, God's mighty truths will march onward to the accomplishment of His vast designs.

It is worthy of note that those who denounce the doctrine of eternal punishment fight very shy of Scripture. But what else could be expected, since the texts which, to say the least, *seem* to teach the doctrine, are so numerous and plain that nothing short of utter distortion can make them mean anything else; while the few that are pressed into the service to buttress up the notions of annihilation or restoration give an unwilling testimony and afford a feeble support.

And yet, in all fairness, I must admit that the objections of the more thoughtful opponents of this solemn truth do not lie so much against the doctrine as taught in the Scriptures, as against that monstrous perversion of it which at one period was almost universal throughout Christendom;—another count in the indictment of the cast-iron theology of Augustine and Calvin, which made God a merciless tyrant to a majority of His creatures, and man the helpless victim of His vindictive rage.

In the present paper we limit the discussion to the case of those who have heard the gospel. If the unenlightened heathen are to be punished hereafter, it will not be for disobeying a gospel they never heard. But with the heathen we have, at present, nothing to do. We only desire to ascertain, if possible, what is the final outlook for those who from the sound of a preached gospel, and the presence of a crucified Christ, go unsaved to death and the judgment.

There are certain truths in reference to which all believers in revelation hold common ground. All believe in Divine government and law; in the probationary character of man's present state; in a final judgment when the good shall be rewarded and the wicked shall be punished. But just here, in regard to the nature and duration of the punishment, there is wide divergence of opinion. This is the point on which we desire light. Is the punishment of the wicked to last forever? or shall it cease at length in restoration to Divine favour,

or in utter extinction of being? To put it in the incisive words of inspiration, "What shall the end be (*lit.*, 'the ultimate destiny') of them that obey not the gospel of God?"

I. IT SHALL NOT BE A SECOND PROBATION.

1. *A second probation implies that men may be saved through some other medium than the death and intercession of Jesus Christ.* The Scriptures clearly teach that now the government of the world is in the hands of a Mediator; but at the end of man's probation as a race, Jesus ascends the throne of judgment, bestows rewards and assigns to punishment, and having put down all antagonistic authority and power, delivers up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. xv. 24-28). Then the mediation of Christ will cease, and the name of Jesus will no longer be available as a sinner's plea. If, therefore, a sinner can be forgiven and saved during a second probation, it must be on other conditions and by other means than in the present life; and if by other means and on other grounds than the death and intercession of the Son of God, then the death of Jesus was a terrible mistake; for if God can forgive and save a sinner in a future state without a Saviour, He can in this. If He cannot in this life, He cannot at all.

But possibly some advocate of a second probation may say, "You mistake our meaning. We have no expectation of successive probations beyond the judgment; we only claim that in the interval between death and the judgment those who had no chance in this life,—who never heard of a Saviour's love, who were surrounded from infancy by the darkness of heathenism,—will have an opportunity of hearing and accepting the gospel."

If this be what is meant by a second probation, it does not touch the class whose case we are now considering, namely, those who heard the gospel but did not obey it. For them no second probation can be claimed on the ground that they had no light. The ground of their condemnation will be that they "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds" were "evil." And even in regard to the heathen the claim is irrelevant, for they will not be judged by the law of a gospel revelation, but only by the law written in their hearts.

2. *To claim a second probation is to charge God with want*

of fairness in His dealings, since it implies that a sufficient chance has not been given to some in a first probation. Sufficient chance of what? Why, of knowing the gospel and the way to heaven. But observe, the condemnation is not that they did not *know* the gospel, but that knowing it they did not *obey*. That which God requires of every man is that he follow promptly and faithfully the light he has; and surely, upon the very face of it, all men have an equal chance of that. If the heathen are condemned it is not because they did not believe on Jesus, of whom they had never heard, but because "when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." And if the heathen, who have only the light of nature and the natural conscience, are without excuse, much more they who have the light of Divine revelation in the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. On no grounds of equity can they claim a second probation.

3. *A second probation could not bring within our reach Divine agencies more potent than those now employed.*—God does not bring men to Himself by a force which compels the will, but by an appeal to motives the most powerful that can influence human conduct. Is belief of the gospel necessary to salvation? There will be no new gospel preached "unto the spirits in prison" whose truths can outweigh those of the "gospel of the grace of God." Is a Divine Saviour the only object of saving faith? There is no other Christ who, in the other world, can bid the sinner "look and live." Is a Divine Spirit the only power that can awaken the conscience and renew the heart? That Spirit operates among men here and now, but we have no hint in Scripture that He carries on His regenerating work in the world to come. And if these mighty agencies fail, in any instance, to bring men to repentance *here*, is there reason to believe the same agencies,—or others, if such are conceivable,—will be more successful *there*? On the contrary, the probabilities of salvation during a second probation, if such were afforded, would be vastly less than during a first, for a man would enter that second probation with hardened sensibilities, with the sins of a first probation already in his way, and with the increased difficulties arising from matured bad character, and fixed habits of resisting the Spirit of God.

But, it is contended, the advantage of a second probation would be this:—In the spirit world the supreme importance of salvation would be so clearly seen and so deeply felt, that men would then yield to the Spirit of God and be saved. The idea seems plausible, but in reality is utterly fallacious. It assumes there are other means of convincing men more powerful than the truth and Spirit of God. But this point has been settled by one from whose decision there is no appeal:—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." It is not more light and pressure from *without* that men need, but simply willingness *within*.

4. *The doctrine of a second probation, without express Divine warrant, implies a hundred or a thousand; for no better reasons could be assigned for punishing an impenitent sinner at the end of a second probation than at the end of a first. But at the close of each succeeding probation the probabilities of the salvation of the impenitent would be inconceivably lessened; and so for such we are driven to the alternative of eternal probation or eternal punishment. There is a universal tendency among men to "neglect" the "great salvation," and one of the most powerful motives to dissuade them from this is furnished by the near approach of the day when, as they believe, life and opportunity shall cease together. Hold out to such the prospect of a second probation, and the force of this motive is entirely neutralized; for the great majority of unconverted men would desire nothing better than to continue as they are through an unending probation. Therefore, as the tendency of this doctrine is to lead men to neglect salvation, it cannot be from God.*

5. *Above all, there is no hint in Scripture that men will have a second probation.*—All that is said there on the subject of man's destiny points in an opposite direction. He is exhorted to "flee from the wrath to come," and "lay hold on eternal life;" he is warned that the barren ground "is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned;" he is assured that "now is the accepted time, behold even now is the day of salvation;" he is summoned, as it were in advance, to the judgment, and hears the voice of Christ saying, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his

angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink. I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not;"—as though to remind him that the opportunity for these "works meet for repentance" (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the prisoner) would cease the moment he left this world. And from all these words of solemn warning is not this the appeal that comes to our hearts to-day:—"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh." "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

II. IT SHALL NOT BE ANNIHILATION.

This view of man's final destiny has been much pressed of late; but it seems to me to be only a blind attempt to escape from a perverted notion of the doctrine of everlasting punishment. The vindictive theology of a by-gone day has conjured up a horrid demon, before which many have recoiled in terror, and have sought refuge in the theory of the utter extinction of being. The theory is based upon materialism—the denial of man's natural immortality. It is contended that whatever may have been man's primitive endowments, he, in consequence of sin, became mortal in soul as well as in body; that eternal life, in the sense of immortality, belongs only to those who believe in Jesus Christ, and all others are doomed to ultimate annihilation. Some appear to hold that this extinction of being takes place at death; while others hold that it occurs only after a long period of suffering subsequent to the final judgment. But it matters little which view is presented, since both are repugnant to reason and Scripture. It is seen that the passages which teach a resurrection of both good and bad are too numerous and plain to be set aside; but a theory has been propounded to the effect that though the sinner dies, soul and body, like the brutes, and there is an end of him, yet God, in some miraculous way, keeps some part of him alive till the judgment-day, when the body is raised and re-united with the soul, and then he is to be tormented in such a manner and for such a time as may seem good to Divine justice, after which he is to be abolished out of the universe. To this view there are strong and, I think, unanswerable objections:—

1. *Belief in immortality has been almost universal from the earliest ages.*—The Egyptians believed it, and taught the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. So in Assyria, in Greece, and in India, the idea of immortality prevailed, “and was a tremendous factor in the” religious “life of the world.” In India this thought of immortality, apart from any knowledge of a Saviour, was so terrible, that they sought refuge in the doctrine of a final painless absorption of the human spirit into the Supreme. Here, then, we have, long before gospel times, a belief in immortality well-nigh universal, and this universality of the idea proves it to be one of those primal truths, inwoven in the very fibres of being by the God who made us,—an inward and unanswerable conviction that while the body is subject to death and decay, there is that within us which survives alike the flight of time and the ravages of sickness, and which shall still endure when all earthly things have passed away. It is nowhere said that the gospel originated the doctrine, but that it was brought to light by the gospel,—brought out of the dim region of guesses, and hopes, and inferences, into the clear light of plain revelation. And yet we are sometimes told that this is a new doctrine, and that the almost universal belief in it that preceded Christianity was but a delusion and a dream; which is tantamount to saying that the heathen had dreamed out a grander idea of man’s nature and destiny than the Scriptures have revealed; that the Bible which proclaims that the Incarnate God died for man, also declares that the race for whom He died are but a race of superior brutes!

But, we are told, the Hebrew term for “soul” covers alike the soul of man and of animals, and therefore they must belong to the same order. Now, if this were so it would prove nothing; for I find in the Scriptures other statements concerning man’s nature and destiny which mark him off as something entirely distinct and different from the brutes. In the first chapter of Genesis we read: “And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind;” but a little farther on we read: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion,” so “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and

breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives ; and man became a living soul." The Psalmist declares that God made man "a little lower than the angels," and "crowned him with glory and honour," but no such statement is made in the Scriptures concerning the brutes.

2. *The Scriptures constantly assume the immortality of the soul as a doctrine that needs no proof.*—Materialists and annihilationists often tell us that the immortality of the soul is nowhere expressly asserted in Scripture. Neither, for that matter, is the existence of God. Moses, in the first verse of Genesis, does not assert or prove the existence of God, but assuming it as an indisputable truth, he begins with the announcement that "God created the heavens and the earth." The same is true in regard to the doctrine of immortality: it is everywhere assumed as a truth having the force of an axiom, and requiring no proof. When the record of Enoch's translation was penned, did the Holy Spirit intend us to believe that he died like a beast? Can we for a moment conceive that the Twenty-third Psalm was uttered by one who believed not in immortality? When Elijah soared into heaven in his chariot of fire, did Elisha, gazing upward, suppose that he had ceased to be? It is utterly incredible. The whole of Jewish thought was saturated with the idea of immortal life. It was a truth universally regarded as beyond dispute. And if any one shall say these were the utterances, and these the experiences, of believers, all of whom have immortal life in Christ, our answer is ready. He who knew all the secrets of the invisible world, for He had been there, has lifted the veil and let in a flash of light: "The rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." This was not a believer, and yet he lives on in conscious existence beyond death and burial. I know how this awful passage is by some twisted and distorted to get it out of the way of the annihilation theory; but there it stands, and will be a swift witness against such in the great day.

3. *The terms used in Scripture to describe the future doom of the wicked do not convey the idea of annihilation.*—The contrary, I know, is often asserted with a conceited confidence that is supposed to end all dispute; but a little reflection will show on what slender grounds the assertion is made. Suppose it to

be true that in Scripture a term is sometimes used to describe the doom of the wicked, the ordinary meaning of which is destruction, this is just what might be expected. When "holy men of old" were "moved by the Holy Ghost" to speak concerning the future of the wicked, they were not supplied with a new vocabulary in which to utter their conceptions; they used terms with which they were already familiar, "enlarging their meanings to the measure of that larger world." The Christian revelation has given a new meaning to such words as "life" and "death," "salvation" and "destruction." "But," say the advocates of the annihilation theory, "these words are always used in Scripture in their exact, literal meaning." Are they, indeed? Let us try. Take, for example, these sayings of Christ: "If a man keep My sayings he shall never see death." "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." This was spoken after the death of Lazarus, who had suffered dissolution, and would suffer it again. Is the word "death" used here in its literal meaning? Not so. Evidently Christ intended to call attention to a new meaning of the word.

Again, it is contended by some that men have immortality only in Christ, and that all who are not in Him shall perish, in the sense of ceasing to be. This is a fundamental error, and arises from confusion in the use of terms. It confounds "life" with mere "existence." We know that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ," and if life meant mere existence, the natural inference would be that those who had not accepted Christ would, at death, cease to be. But the "gift" which the believer receives is not immortality; all men have that in the very nature with which God has endowed them; but he receives that gift which lifts *existence* into *LIFE*,—that which make immortality a source of endless and unspeakable joy. Then it must be remembered that most annihilationists hold that man does not utterly cease to be at death; but that some part of him—enough, perhaps, to identify him at the resurrection—is kept in existence by God, through the long, terrible ages preceding the judgment; that then the soul and body, being re-united, shall suffer horrible torments through a period whose duration no man can tell; and when they have suffered long enough to satisfy Divine justice, they shall sink into utter annihilation. *But what is this something that lives*

on? According to the theory the man is dead, body and soul; hence this something is not the body—that has turned to dust; neither is it the soul—that has ceased to be. Is it, then, something called into existence to take the place of that which has ceased to be? If so, it is no part of the man, hence can have no connection with him at the judgment. This something is either part of the man or it is not; but if it is, then there is some part of him which survives the shock of death, and may survive forever.

This word "death" is, by annihilationists, sadly misinterpreted and misapplied. It is assumed that the law, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," refers to physical dissolution; but that although man did eat the prohibited fruit, the law was suspended by the introduction of a redemptive scheme. This is a mere assumption. There was no suspension of the law. In the very day that man transgressed, he died in the sense in which God had used the term. He lost his true life, the life of God in the soul. Death, in the sense of physical dissolution, is a universal law of nature, and therefore is not the penalty of sin. The Scriptures nowhere assert that the *cause* of death is sin, though they declare that the *sting* of death is. But perhaps some reader is saying, "Surely you forget the passage which declares, 'by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,' and that other awful declaration, 'the wages of sin is death.'" No; I do not forget these Scriptures; I only remember what so many seem to have forgotten, or never knew, that the leading reference in these passages is not to physical dissolution at all, but to that infinitely more terrible thing, the loss of Divine life,—death forever in trespasses and sins.

I know it is very generally supposed that but for the interposition of a redemptive scheme, a sentence of literal death would have been executed upon the first transgressors, and thus the human race would have become extinct. This also is a mere assumption, growing out of a false interpretation of the term "death." If the interposition of a Saviour could alone prevent the extinction of a sinful race, how comes it that the devil and his angels have not been annihilated? At any rate we may rest assured that had no Saviour been provided, the extinction of the human race would have been an act of mercy

rather than judgment; since the perpetuation of a sinful race without a Saviour would have been only an unmitigated curse.

4. *This doctrine becomes increasingly repugnant when viewed in the light of redeeming love.*—The promise of Divine Incarnation for human redemption dates back to the time of man's first sin; but the theory to which we refer presents the awful spectacle of the mighty God becoming incarnate to confer immortality upon a race, or part of a race, of brutes; while the marvellous expenditure of Calvary was for the redemption of one "whom a brick-bat might extinguish in an instant!" Oh, if immortality were not man's natural and inalienable birthright, would not it have been infinitely more merciful to have suffered the race to become extinct at the fountain-head, than to suspend a law and bestow upon them a fresh lease of an existence that to multitudes would prove only a corroding curse? But if immortality be man's native endowment, then we begin to see why such mighty agencies were put in operation to save him from self-wrought and eternal ruin, and we get another ray of light upon the wondrous story that "God so loved the world." I know it is common enough to hear the statement that there was nothing in man to attract God's love. I make bold—not in the spirit of pride or boasting, but of reverent thankfulness to God—to assert the contrary. They were His children, and though wayward and rebellious, He loved them still. His image had been in them, though now marred and defaced; and to restore that image, and bring back the wandering children, the Lord of glory stooped from heaven to earth, and the Son of God became the Son of man. But in the light of this monstrous doctrine of annihilation, what means the expression "Son of man?" It can mean only "Son of an animal!" for inasmuch as "the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same."

III. IT SHALL NOT BE RESTORATION AFTER A LIMITED PERIOD OF PUNISHMENT.

1. *This theory is based on the assumption that suffering can do for man that which Christ failed to accomplish, forgetting that punishment is the result of neglecting the only way of salvation, and is not itself a means of salvation.* Let us suppose

for a moment that the theory is true—that suffering can save men,—and we are at once confronted by the awful spectacle of rival Saviours, and our ears catch the echo of rival songs of praise: “A great multitude that no man can number,” singing, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His blood, . . . to Him be glory both now and forever;” and another multitude, perhaps equally great, singing, “Unto the penal fires that burned the sin out of us, be glory both now and forever.” The supposition is too horrible even to be talked about, so we pass on.

2. *Those who teach the theory of Restoration entirely misapprehend the design and effect of punishment.*—They suppose it to be always and everywhere corrective, and designed for reformation, never retributive. This is a great mistake. The idea of retribution enters into almost every form of punishment inflicted by either God or man.

There are three aspects of punishment which cover the whole ground. It is either (1) Corrective, the object of which is the reformation of the offender; or, (2) Preventive, the object being to deter others from sinning; or, (3) Retributive, the object of which is to inflict deserved penalty upon the impenitent. To these three aspects of punishment there are, in the universe, three corresponding Powers:—1. The Family, where punishment, as to its design, is chiefly corrective; 2. The State, whose punishments are chiefly deterrent or preventive; 3. The Supreme Being, whose punishments are often retributive. In God's dealings with men all three aspects appear; but in this life the first two are the more prominent. He “chastises” His children, “not for His pleasure but for their profit, that they might be partakers of His holiness.” Such, however, are not retributive punishments, but fatherly corrections, which in the end yield “the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.” But in His dealings with the ungodly we perceive a marked difference. There the retributive element appears, and not uncommonly it is “judgment without mercy.” When God punished the antediluvian world with a universal deluge, there was no subsequent restoration to His favour when the punishment was over. When He overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, the baptism of penal fire had in it no corrective element. It was “judgment without mercy,” and

affords a significant indication of the principles upon which the Divine government proceeds. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under one or two witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, and counted it an unholy thing; and hath done despite to the Spirit of His grace." But observe, it is only upon the impenitent that God inflicts the "sorer punishment." He who yields to God's mercy finds forgiveness, present, full, and free; but he who passes unsaved beyond the boundary of this life's probation, shall find "no place of repentance though he seek it carefully with tears." When a sinner has suffered for ages he is no more worthy of Divine favour than before, because the evil nature remains unchanged. "The Lord knoweth how to . . . reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished;" but no hint is given that he reserves them to be restored to favour when the punishment is over.

3. *Punishment has not the power which some claim for it, of even deterring men from sin in the future.*—Wicked men are often punished in this life, and yet run greedily after sin again. Behold the libertine, who has already received in himself the recompense that is meet! His substance wasted; his body rotting in the foul disease engendered of his lust; does he forsake his beastly wickedness because of the punishment? No! he only curses the law that entails the misery. Behold the drunkard! How often he has been stricken and punished. Wealth squandered—health impaired—home destroyed—friends all gone. Does he stop? Does he even pause? Very seldom. Down he goes to lower and still lower deeps, till the untold horrors of *delirium tremens* seize upon him, and he suffers, before the time, all the agonies of the lost. How all the forms and forces of the infernal regions seem to gather around him! Loathsome insects "weave their soft webs about his face;" slimy serpents with forked tongues and burning eyes crawl upon his couch, and hiss with fetid breath in his maddened ears; horrible demons sit upon his labouring chest, and choke back his stifled cry for help. With piercing shriek he turns to fly, but suddenly, at his very feet, yawns a terrific chasm, through the blackness of whose darkness surge waves of tempestuous fire; and as he

sinks, and *sinks*, and SINKS, through fathomless voids of space, on every jutting crag sits a horrid fiend who with devilish leer mocks his despairing terror and cries, "Art thou become as one of us?" Oh, is there anything more dreadful foreshadowed in Scripture? And yet does it deter him? No! when the awful visitation is past he cries, "I will seek it yet again!"

4. *The theory assumes that man can exhaust the curse and penalty of sin*, and hence that the death of Jesus Christ was wholly unnecessary. Of this, however, there is no hint in the Scriptures. They teach that when the sinner is cast into prison "he shall in no wise come out thence till he has paid the uttermost farthing;" while as to his ability it is declared he has "nothing" wherewith "to pay." In this theory it is forgotten that sin is a self-perpetuating evil, and man cannot exhaust its curse by enduring it unless sin itself is destroyed. But punishment cannot destroy sin: only Divine grace can do that; and the sinner who passes unsaved into the spirit world goes where grace cannot reach him. If the penalty of sin could be exhausted by suffering, punishment would cease to be punishment, and would become a means of grace. But of this no hint is given in the teachings of the Word of God. The punishments of the future are "the wages of sin," not moral forces by which a lapsed soul can be restored to holiness and the favour of God.

5. *Assuming, for a moment, the possibility of Restoration, how, in the nature of things, is it to be brought about?*—Shall it be by the mere fiat of Omnipotence? That cannot be. "The Divine government," says the Rev. Marshall Randles, "is not a series of isolated arbitrary acts; but a vast network of relations, wide and lasting as the universe, in which sin and punishment stand to each other as cause and effect. It is in the nature of sin to tend to perpetuate itself, and to produce misery. This process is a matter of natural and moral law. To cut off the proper effect of sin, and cause it to be followed by eternal joy, by the sheer force of Omnipotence, would not only be an abrupt break in the course of natural law, but a violent wrench of moral relations, forcibly making sin the precursor of happiness, which would not be less violent than to make piety the precursor of wretchedness. If a simple fiat of God's authority might empty the bottomless pit, why not a similar fiat have

obviated the necessity for the humiliation of the Divine Son in the redemption of mankind? and why not in the same way have prevented all the agonies and inconveniences ever incurred by sin?"*

Still more difficult is it to conceive that anything in the circumstances or surroundings of a fallen spirit can effect its restoration. Suffering and misery are the result of sin, and while the sin continues the suffering must endure. If sin were to cease the moment the soul entered the spirit world, the idea of exhausting sin's penalty might not appear so hopeless; but if sin perpetuates itself in this life, despite all remedial influences, much more will it do so when all those influences are withdrawn; and thus unending sin carries with it unending suffering as its inevitable corollary. The impenitent sinner goes into "outer darkness," to the "worm" that "dieth not," and to the "fire" that "shall not be quenched;" and even supposing these to be but figures of speech, they are not suggestive of anything that could produce in the sufferers "repentance unto salvation," or create one solitary aspiration after a better life. It may be accepted as an axiom that a thing cannot communicate what it does not possess; and in the surroundings of a lost soul there is nothing that can purify the conscience, or deliver from the guilt of sin.

Nor yet—taking the New Testament for our guide—are we permitted to suppose that a lost soul can, in the other world, be restored through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The inestimable value of that mediation here and now is pressed upon our attention in a thousand ways; but no hint is given that it will avail anything in the world to come. The very urgency of the Gospel message indicates that this life is the crisis-hour of human existence, into the brief compass of which are crowded opportunities that can never return again. If this were not so,—if beyond this life there were even remote possibilities of salvation,—the intensely earnest invitations, warnings and entreaties of the gospel would sound like solemn mockeries. When the one talent was taken from the unprofitable servant, it was never restored; when the hopeless debtor who owed "ten thousand talents" (more than \$8,000,000), "was delivered to the tormentors," it was a sentence of perpetual imprisonment;

**For Ever*, p. 315.

when the foolish virgins came with the despairing cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" the door stubbornly refused to open, while from within came the death-knell of departing hope—"Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

IV. IT SHALL BE PUNISHMENT.

The Scriptures teach "that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust," (Acts xxiv. 15); that following the resurrection there shall be a general judgment, when "every one" shall "receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This teaching commends itself to every enlightened conscience. That goodness should be rewarded and wickedness punished, is a proposition that has the force of an axiom. It harmonizes with the eternal *oughtness* of things. In every man good or evil predominates; but as all men are free agents, good or evil must be voluntary. Voluntary goodness deserves reward; voluntary badness deserves punishment. Hence the argument which gives goodness a reward beyond the grave, gives wickedness punishment beyond the grave. There is a future state of reward for the righteous: *therefore*, there is a future state of punishment for the wicked.

1. *The punishment shall be exceedingly terrible.*—I do not infer this, as it is often said the Churches do, from the dramatic pictures of Pollock or Milton; I infer it from the clear and solemn statements of the Word of God. And I would remind the thoughtful reader that the most terrible utterances in the New Testament concerning the punishment of the lost, came from the lips of Him whose pitying tenderness brought Him from heaven to earth to die for the sins of mankind. Such words from His lips are not mere rhetorical flourishes, but sober statements of solemn realities. It is sometimes said that Christ's words are figurative, and should not be interpreted literally. That may be true in many instances, but a figure implies a reality behind it, and in this case a reality far more dreadful than the figure by which it is set forth. It is idle to speculate as to whether the punishment shall be corporeal, or whether the instruments of that punishment shall be material substances: enough to know that something unspeakably dreadful must be intended

when it can be best represented by the gnawing of a worm that never dies, and the burning of a fire that shall not be quenched.

2. *The punishment shall be forever.*—This is the aspect of the doctrine most frequently and strongly objected to. It seems to some a terrible thing that for the sins of the present life men should suffer through all the ages of the undying future. This, however, is hardly a fair statement of the question. It must be remembered that the sufferings of the lost are a *result* as well as a *penalty*, and that these sufferings largely grow out of the character which the sinner forms in this life. This is in perfect accord with the principle—"Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap;" he shall reap *that*—not something else instead of that. There is a terrible inexorableness in what are called the "laws of nature," which is but another name for the laws of God. Those laws are beneficent, and work for beneficent ends; but when resisted, disobeyed, defied, they show no mercy, but remorselessly punish whatsoever or whosoever stands in the way. If a man puts himself in deliberate antagonism to God and His laws, he must suffer the consequences, and if in this life he forms a character which puts him in eternal antagonism, he must suffer eternal consequences.

The words of Christ on this awful theme are distinct and unequivocal: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Some have tried, by reckless verbal criticism, to neutralize the force of the declaration, and assert that the words translated "eternal" and "everlasting" do not signify duration without end. I assert, on the contrary, that these words, in the Scriptures, *always* have that meaning, unless limited by other words, or by the circumstances of the case. "The Hebrew word is OLAM, the Greek, AIONION, (Matt. xxv. 46), and these are the words used to express the eternity of God, and the duration of the blessedness of the righteous. If, therefore, the punishment of the wicked is not eternal, then God is not eternal, and the reward of the righteous is not eternal." Furthermore, if these words do not mean duration without end, I know of no word in either language which does.

By others the doctrine is opposed by arguments drawn, or

supposed to be drawn, from the nature and attributes of God. It is said "God is love," and it is incredible that He will consign millions of beings to endless torment for the sins of the present life; that such punishment would imply vindictiveness, which is utterly foreign to His nature. Let us look at this a little more closely. A man is tried for a capital offence; he is convicted, condemned and executed. You are greatly shocked. You go to the executioner and say, "Why were you so vindictive against this man?" "Vindictive!" he answers; "on the contrary, I pitied him from my heart, and would gladly have avoided the terrible task of being his executioner; but the judge had sentenced him to die by my hand, and I only carried out that sentence." You go to the judge, and say, "How could you be so cruel as to sentence that man to a violent death? I had supposed that such vindictiveness would be utterly foreign to your nature." But the judge replies, "My friend, you are utterly mistaken in supposing that I was moved by vindictiveness. I but discharged a most painful duty—a duty that wrung my heart with pain and filled my eyes with tears. But the jury had found him guilty of a capital offence, and I had no choice." You next go to the jury; but they tell you they were under solemn oath to render a verdict according to the evidence, and the evidence in this case was direct and clear as to the prisoner's guilt. You question the witnesses, and they say they were sworn to tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and as they had personal knowledge of the man's guilt, they had no choice but to testify accordingly. You question the officer who made the arrest, but he tells you a warrant for the prisoner's apprehension was placed in his hands by the magistrate before whom information had been laid, and he was compelled to execute the commission. You go to the magistrate, but there is no vindictiveness there; he has but obeyed the law in ordering the arrest of the prisoner. One step farther backward, and you question the law-makers, "How could you be so vindictive as to pass so terrible a law?" But with one voice they answer, "We were not vindictive; we only discharged a public duty; we only voiced a great public sentiment that, for the protection of human life, murder should be made punishable with death." Here, then, you have gone back, step by step, from the executioner to the judge, from the

judge to the jury, from the jury to the witnesses, from the witnesses to the officer, from the officer to the magistrate, from the magistrate to the law-makers, from the law-makers to public opinion, but you find no vindictiveness anywhere. Who, then, is to blame because this man has been put to death? NO ONE BUT HIMSELF! And yet, so far as society is able, it has inflicted on this man *eternal punishment*.

Yes, the punishment shall be eternal. But what is ETERNITY? "Its significance is as high and wide and deep and grand as God is." He alone fills it, and He alone comprehends it. Time can be measured, not so Eternity. Let imagination attempt its loftiest and most daring flight through the dim and shadowy past; let it pass swiftly up the line of the centuries, past the rise of nations, past the birth of man, past the dawn of time; backward still till suns and systems shrink and fade, till angels disappear, till it reaches the awful solitude where nothing is save God, and yet it will be no nearer Eternity's beginning than when first its flight began. Then let it turn on mighty pinions, and dart swifter than the lightning, swift as thought, into the awful gulf of Eternity to come; onward while nations rise and droop and die; onward while dynasties change and pass; onward while time grows hoary with the lapse of centuries; onward still, past the solemnities of death and the terrors of judgment, and into that awful solitude beyond where time is not; onward through cycles that no arithmetic can compute, till reason reels and staggers in her effort to grasp the thought,—and still, when myriads of ages, as men count time, have passed, it will be no nearer Eternity's dread close than when first its adventurous pinion dared the infinite abyss. "What shall the end be?" Great God! there is no end!—there is no end!

3. *The punishment shall be banishment from God.*—Scripture testimony is very plain on this matter, and very solemn. We are distinctly told that a day is coming, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power," (2 Thess. i. 8, 9). The term

"everlasting destruction," as it occurs in these verses, has been pressed into service to teach the annihilation of the wicked; but that this is not its meaning is plain from the words of Christ elsewhere, (Matt. xxv. 46), where an entirely different word is used, which does not mean destruction, in this sense, at all. This idea of banishment from God is one of the most awful in connection with the punishment of the lost. They are to be "cast into outer darkness," and this must be beyond the circle of order and light. *Where* this is we can but dimly guess; for beyond the limits of law and order we can scarcely conceive of either "place" or "time." To human investigation God's universe appears well-nigh limitless. Unaided vision touches only the hither side of the starry universe; but by telescopic power we pierce to depths so inconceivably vast that even the flashing light, travelling 12,000,000 of miles in every minute of time, could not cross the interval in less than a thousand years. Throughout all these regions of inconceivable magnitude, law and order reign. "God, and the glory of His power" are there.

But imagination, overleaping these almost illimitable barriers, finds herself in a region still beyond,—a region of darkness, and of the shadow of death. And—who can tell?—perhaps in this "outer darkness," on some wandering star that has broken away from its orbit,—that has dashed over the frontiers of a law-abiding creation, the finally impenitent may find their everlasting abode. And as that world has broken away from all law and order, so it has fled beyond light, and goes wandering in darkness that may be felt, sinking evermore in fathomless voids of space, where only chaos reigns; rolling beyond the confines of life, with no sun or star to light its horrid gloom, or chase away its foul and foetid vapours: its only light, if light it may be called, the murky flames that hiss out from a thousand fissures; a world that shudders in the throes of perpetual earthquakes; where in all the range of its vast circumference there is no trace of life or beauty; no budding plant or blooming flower; no purling brook or flowing river; no virgin beauty of morning, or golden splendour of evening, or mystic pomp of starry night; a world stripped of the last remnant of its primeval loveliness, abhorred of angels and accursed of God!

"Splintered and blasted, and thunder-smitten,
 Not a smile above nor a hope below ;
 Withered, and scorched, and hunger-bitten,
 No earthly lightning has seamed its brow ;
 On each stone the avenger's pen hath written
 Horror, and ruin, and death, and woe !"

Behold "the end of them that obey not the gospel." The Judge "shall send forth His angels, and they shall sever the wicked from among the just;" "they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity;" they shall "bind them hand and foot" and carry them to the utmost verge, and there, as on the battlements of a living, law-abiding universe, the multitude of terror-stricken men and women, who obeyed not the gospel of God, for a short space shall stand. One last backward look at the light and beauty they shall never more behold; one last agonizing thought of friends and home from which they are exiled forever; one last despairing effort to shut their eyes against the unutterable horrors of the "outer darkness" that awaits them; and then flung by archangel power beyond the outer verge, they sink through awful voids till they reach the place accursed where henceforth they must dwell. And then that world, freighted with its unutterable burden of misery and sin, speeds away, away, into the darkness of unfathomable space: lost in a darkness from which there is no return! *lost* where no ray of hope can ever come! *LOST* where they shall not even know in what direction heaven lies! *LOST* where mightiest angel, sweeping on fearless wing beyond the limits of God's creation, shall never find so much as its bones!

But is this the *end*? Alas, no! this is only the beginning of the end! What the end shall be only God can tell.

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